

# **Testimony of State Representative Steve Wieckert**

## **Assembly Bill 620 – Precious Cargo** *Assembly Committee on Transportation* *Room 417 North – January 3, 2008*

Good morning Chairman Petrowski and committee members. I am pleased to come before you today to discuss Assembly Bill 620, Precious Cargo.

This legislation would help protect our students from accident and injury traveling to and from school. This would be achieved by allowing school districts to tap the expertise of the Department of Transportation when planning new school construction or major remodeling activities. DOT would review the site plan and make recommendations on the best ways to provide for traffic flow and make suggestions on the safest ways to deliver students to school. Items to be reviewed would include road design, entrances to the school and parking lot, sidewalks, bike paths, bus lanes, bypass lanes, left-hand turn lanes, and any other area which the DOT feels would be helpful in providing for traffic safety and the reduction of traffic congestion.

The DOT would also benefit as it plans new roads and transportation facilities by knowing where new schools may be planned. The increased communication this bill would encourage would also help school boards to make more informed site locations for schools by knowing of future road layout plans of the DOT. This is common sense. It happens to some degree now but I would like to see it applied more consistently around the state. Wisconsin has over a million children in school, 1,030,276 to be exact.

Student safety traveling to and from school is indeed an important issue throughout the United States. Unfortunately, too many students lose their lives going to and from school every year in the United States caused by traffic accidents.

Texas has a very successful program to reduce traffic accidents near schools. Both the Department of Transportation in Texas and the school districts speak highly of it. This legislation was modeled after this program.

When this bill was before this committee last session, an official from the Department of Transportation of Texas appeared before the committee to explain how the program works and how beneficial it is. Texas continues to report positive outcomes as a result of this legislation. The program has been so

successful, in fact, that it has even received the coveted national "1000 Points of Light" Award.

This legislation was developed over a number of years, with numerous meetings with Department of Transportation officials to develop a draft of legislation, which would be efficient and practical to implement. I thank the Department of Transportation for their continued cooperation and open-mindedness on this issue.

I appreciate the Department of Transportation's support for this legislation.

This legislation is supported by:

- Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance
- Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools
- Wisconsin Association of School Boards
- 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin
- Wisconsin School Bus Association
- Texas Department of Transportation

DOT now offers this service for highway repair and bridge construction to municipalities. In many ways, this legislation would be an extension of that, allowing school districts to have their new school plans reviewed for student safety by DOT.

One example in Texas... after DOT reviewed a site plan, they suggested turning the school 180 degrees to face a less traveled road that significantly reduced traffic congestion, improved safety, and made stop lights unnecessary on a highly trafficked road.

You have two amendments before you today. The first one opens this valuable review process to private schools, whose children will benefit from good proactive traffic planning as will public school children. The second amendment will provide for the DOT plan review of proposed bicycle paths and other areas that children use as transportation corridors – all to keep them from becoming the unwitting victims of conflicting traffic modes. Never has the old adage been truer: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

This legislation is proactive. It is not glamorous or glitzy, but it is hard working, good government policy that in the long term, as new schools are built, will help provide for student safety. We will not know the names of the students whose lives we have saved or injuries we prevent, but it is clearly a very noble thing to do.

Thank you. At this time I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

# SUV kills Madison school worker

Her death while arriving at Cherokee Middle School may prompt review of crosswalks and traffic patterns.

By DEBORAH ZIFF  
dziff@madison.com  
608-252-6120

A "much beloved" library assistant at Cherokee Middle School was killed while walking across Cherokee Drive toward the school Monday morning, authorities said.

Becky Sue Buchmann, 48, of Oregon, was not doing anything out of

the ordinary when she parked across the street from the school on Cherokee Drive, then cut across the grassy median as she walked toward the school's front doors around 7:13 a.m., Superintendent Art Rainwater said.

But as she was crossing, a man driving a red sport utility vehicle who had dropped his son off in front of the school pulled out, hitting Buchmann. A few students were looking on as she was hit, and staff members came to her aid, one calling 911, police said. She was taken to UW Hospital, where she was pronounced dead.

The driver has not been arrested or cited, but police say the investigation is ongoing. His name was not released.

Students were notified of Buch-

mann's death by their classroom teachers Monday afternoon. Grief counselors were at the school, at 4301 Cherokee Drive, to comfort students and staff, Rainwater said. The school district also handed out letters for students to take home.

Buchmann had worked in the library at Cherokee for eight years, helping students with research and providing support for teachers.

"She was one of those people who was a continual contributor to the school in many, many ways," Rainwater said. "She was involved in literally everything at the school."

Andy O'Connell, a ninth-grader who

Please see **WORKER**, Page A6



Becky Sue Buchmann had worked at Cherokee Middle School for eight years, helping students and teachers use the library.

## Worker

Continued from Page A1

attended Cherokee for the previous three years, was picking up his younger sister Wednesday afternoon.

"She was my favorite library teacher," he said, eyes red-rimmed with tears. "She always knew my name."

"There is no crosswalk mid-block on Cherokee Drive, so it

is common for teachers to walk across the middle of the block rather than making the trip to the crosswalk at Midvale Boulevard, Rainwater said.

Asked whether a change in the school's traffic pattern is needed, Rainwater said, "I certainly wouldn't make that conclusion at this point. Our concentration right now is on the well-being of staff and students." He said the district may look at the issue later.

Madison Police Department spokesman Joel DeSpain said

investigators have not indicated that the area is problematic.

"I'm not aware of any other crashes that would be any way remotely similar to this one," DeSpain said.

But the incident may spark an evaluation of car and pedestrian habits in front of Cherokee, said Lisa Bullard-Cawthorne, a member of the School Traffic

Wisconsin State Journal

Safety Committee, which evaluates safety at Madison schools. The committee, made up of representatives from the Madison Police Department, the city's traffic engineering department and the school district, has not reviewed Cherokee because it primarily focuses on elementary schools.

"One of the biggest problems

we have around schools are parents dropping their kids off at school," said Bullard-Cawthorne, an employee of the Madison and Dane County Public Health Department.

It's not unprecedented to have a crosswalk in the middle of a block, she said. Both Aldo Leopold and Midvale elementary schools have them.

"If you've got a really long stretch of road, you can't expect someone is going to go all the way to the end of the block," Bullard-Cawthorne said. "If you have a really long stretch of road like Cherokee, it's a lot to expect someone to do."

"It's too bad it took something like this to happen to encourage that discussion," she said.

Thank you for using our printer friendly story page.

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## Vehicles, students, staff a perilous mix

Susan Troller  
September 11, 2007

Few details surrounding the death of a Cherokee Middle School staff member who was struck by an SUV outside the school Monday morning have been released, and no citations or charges have been issued, but the mix of vehicles, students and staff members outside a school has made similar collisions not uncommon.

In addition to 26 student pedestrian accidents in school zones in the last five years, there have been two other crashes involving staff members as they crossed the streets to their schools in the last several years.

Becky Sue Buchmann, 48, a library assistant at Cherokee Middle School who had grown children and several grandchildren and was known for her loving warmth toward her students, was struck and killed by an SUV driven by a parent dropping his son off at school, shortly before the school day started on the first rainy Monday of the new school year.

Buchmann was doing nothing that dozens of visitors and other staff members don't do regularly when she parked her car across the boulevard on Cherokee Drive and crossed the median in the middle of the block in front of the school, officials said Monday. But she never made it across the street to the school where she has worked for eight years.

There is no crosswalk in the center of the long block in front of the west side middle school that serves over 500 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders.

John Matthews, executive director of Madison Teachers Inc., said in an e-mail this morning that many Madison schools lack parking space for staff, which causes teachers and other school workers to park on the street, which he called an avoidable safety hazard.

"We have had two staff members struck by cars within the last few years. A teacher who was hit at West High three years ago, while walking across Regent Street, has ongoing severe health problems as a result," he wrote.

The driver of the red SUV that struck Buchmann so far has not been charged, and no citations have been issued, Joel de Spain, spokesman for the Madison Police Department, said on Monday, but there is an



# School Administrators Alliance

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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February 6, 2007

Representative Steve Wieckert  
PO Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Dear Representative Wieckert:

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to examine your bill, relating to transportation planning and assistance for schools by the Department of Transportation (DOT).

The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) feels that this bill will provide school districts with valuable and needed information from the DOT, as they go about planning their building projects. We are supportive of your bill.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to review this bill. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

John D. Forester  
Director of Government Relations

JF:jh

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4797 Hayes Road, 2nd Floor • Madison, WI 53704 • (608) 242-1370 • Fax (608) 242-1290 • [www.wsaa.org](http://www.wsaa.org)

**An Alliance of:**

Association of Wisconsin  
School Administrators

Wisconsin Association of  
School District Administrators

Wisconsin Association of  
School Business Officials

Wisconsin Council for  
Administrators of Special Services



# Texas Department of Transportation

DEWITT C. GREER STATE HIGHWAY BLDG. • 125 E. 11TH STREET • AUSTIN, TEXAS 78701-2483 • (512) 463-8585

December 1, 2006

The Honorable Steven K. Wieckert  
Wisconsin State Legislature  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, Wisconsin 53708

Dear Representative Wieckert:

I understand there is an initiative in Wisconsin to adopt a statewide Precious Cargo Program. We have seen many successes with the implementation of this program in Texas, and it certainly assists the Texas Department of Transportation in meeting our goal to enhance safety.

Safety near schools is a major concern. The Precious Cargo Program, which was developed by our Dallas District office and implemented across the state, has led to traffic safety improvements at more than 600 schools. This unique proactive approach to educating the public provides a means of establishing and maintaining effective and continued communication.

The main emphasis of this program is to develop good working relationships with school district employees, elected officials and the community so the potential problem areas can be identified and fixed before construction occurs. This allows for easier implementation of safety and operational enhancements for schools and saves time, money and lives at no additional expense to the department.

As the population grows, construction of new schools will be necessary. Schools must work cooperatively with transportation agencies when building these schools along highways that may impact the traveling public. If not, the results may be less than desirable.

Thank you for your interest in our experiences with the Precious Cargo Program. We would be happy to help with any questions you may have as Wisconsin pursues opportunities to enhance safety near schools. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me at (512) 416-3200.

Sincerely,

Carlos A. Lopez, P.E., Director  
Traffic Operations Division

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Association of  
Christian Schools International

Christian Schools International

Diocese of Green Bay

Diocese of LaCrosse

Diocese of Madison

Diocese of Superior

Lutheran Church  
Missouri Synod  
North Wisconsin District

Lutheran Church  
Missouri Synod  
South Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Association of  
Independent Schools

Wisconsin Conference of  
Seventh Day Adventists

Wisconsin Evangelical  
Lutheran Synod  
Northern Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Evangelical  
Lutheran Synod  
Western Wisconsin District

Wisconsin Evangelical  
Lutheran Synod  
Southeastern Wisconsin District

December 4, 2006

Representative Steve Wieckert  
Room 16 West  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Precious Cargo Legislation

Dear Rep. Wieckert:

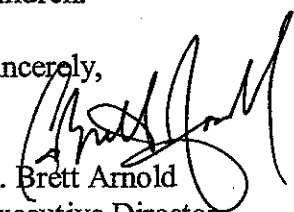
I'm writing to express the support of the Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools for the proposed "precious cargo" legislation to be introduced in the Wisconsin Assembly.

Ensuring that all of Wisconsin's school aged children arrive at and depart school grounds in the most efficient and safe manner possible is an interest that should be shared by all citizens of our state. The paths by which traffic, both automobile and bus, operate in and around school grounds are an important component of any school safety program.

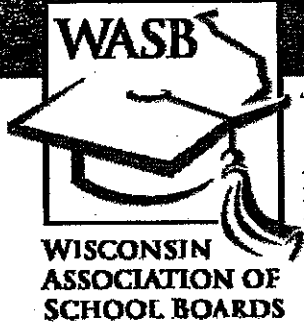
We're encouraged that your proposed bill utilizes the expertise of the Department of Transportation (DOT) to assist schools in designing a traffic flow plan that will ensure the greatest possible measure of safety.

Thank you for your interest in the safety of the state's K-12 school children.

Sincerely,

  
G. Brett Arnold  
Executive Director





"LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE"

JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

122 W. WASHINGTON AVENUE, MADISON, WI 53703  
PHONE: 608-257-2622 FAX: 608-257-8386

TO: Rep. Steve Wieckert

FROM: Sheri Krause, Legislative Services Coordinator

RE: Legislation requiring the Department of Transportation to provide transportation planning and assistance in reviewing the site plan of proposed school construction or enlargement and granting rule-making authority.

DATE: December 4, 2006

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards supports legislation that would require the Department of Transportation (DOT) to provide transportation planning and assistance in reviewing the site plan of proposed school construction or enlargement at the request of a school board.

Such legislation would ensure that Wisconsin school districts have the opportunity to receive guidance on any transportation issue related to the enlargement of school grounds, or the construction or enlargement of school buildings or facilities. This has the potential to be very beneficial to the safety of pupils, school district employees and the public.

It is important to note that the DOT's guidance should only be provided at the request of the school board and the board should not be mandated to comply with the DOT's recommendations.

Thank you for your interest in the WASB's position on this legislation.



**1000 FRIENDS  
OF WISCONSIN**

16 North Carroll Street Suite 810 Madison, WI 53703 phone: 608.259.1000 fax: 608.259.1621  
email: friends@1kfriends.org www.1kfriends.org

Representative Steven Wieckert  
Wisconsin State Capitol  
Room 16 West  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

September 20, 2007

Dear Representative Wieckert:

As a statewide organization that has worked for 10 years educate the public and policy makers about the strong connection between land use and transportation planning decisions—and the effect that those decisions have on our quality of life, public health, environment and economy—1000 Friends of Wisconsin wants to thank you for introducing your school transportation planning bill (currently 2007 LRB-0862/2).


This bill makes the important connection between school planning and transportation safety and we believe it will result in safer school grounds and a wider variety of safe transportation choices being made available to schoolchildren and others who use school facilities around the state.

This bill encourages local school boards to request Department of Transportation review of proposed plans for new schools or additions to existing school facilities. The bill will facilitate coordinated transportation and school facility planning in order to maintain and increase safety for students, teachers and the public traveling to and from schools.

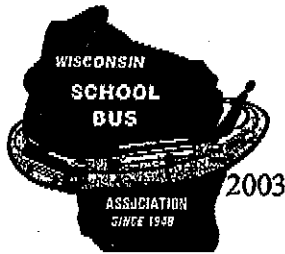
We strongly support the bill's requirement that the Department of Transportation assess the impact of the school building plans on pedestrian, bicycle and public transportation facilities, as well as highways. These provisions recognize that schools serve as community centers for all members of the public, including the elderly and people with disabilities. In many cases, schools are used outside the normal school day by both children and adults. For example, most small town high schools are the community's cultural and athletic activity center. Some high schools serve as after-hours satellite campuses for the regional technical school and they host locally-sponsored adult literacy, GED preparation, and parenting classes. People get to these school buildings in many different ways—on foot, by bike, by bus and by wheelchair—in addition to private cars.

We believe the bill also provides an opportunity to address the growing concern within the public health community about the increase in childhood obesity rates. We hear from parents around the state that they would like to encourage their children to walk or bicycle to schools that are located close to their homes; but new schools, in particular, often forget about connecting the school building to the neighborhoods they serve. If we can do a better job to ensure a number of choices for safe travel to and from schools, perhaps more parents and children will choose to take the active route and get there by bike or on foot.

Sincerely,

  
Lisa MacKinnon  
Policy Director for 1000 Friends of Wisconsin

*1000 Friends of Wisconsin is a statewide nonprofit organization that educates citizens and policy makers about the benefits of responsible land use. We advocate for healthy rural and urban communities and the protection of our natural, cultural and economic resources statewide.*



## WISCONSIN SCHOOL BUS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 168 • Sheboygan, WI 53082-0168 • (920) 457-7008 • Fax (920) 457-5758

www.dirwsba.com • E-mail: wsba@dirwsba.com

Robert W. Christian, Executive Director

Rep. Steve Wieckert

Dear Rep. Wieckert:

The Wisconsin School Bus Association supports your *Precious Cargo Bill*. As I travel the state, I find school buildings with terrible patterns for School Bus Pick-Up and Drop Off Points. Any help the D.O.T. could give these districts would be an added plus on transportation design and safety. The more we can separate school buses from pedestrians and parent pick-ups the safer it will be for Wisconsin School Children.

Thank you for proposing this bill.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Christian